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AUTHOR Bruner, Anna L.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Secondary school teachers in the Houston Independent School District were asked for their perceptions of variables that contributed to difficulty of teaching. A 60-item questionnaire included variables from school environment categories: student characteristics, managerial efficiency, instructional program, material resources, teacher personal needs, teaching assignment characteristics, family/home characteristics, and facilities. Results revealed that the 19 highest ranked variables clustered around classroom management and administrative management. Classroom management concerns were at the top of the list for the teachers; they ranked a lack of administrative support for discipline first, and teaching hostile and disruptive students second. Fifteen of the 19 highest ranked variables concerned responsibilities of either building or upper management. The findings emphasized a need for less administrative paperwork, fewer interruptions over the school intercom, and smooth management of necessary changes in the daily routine. There was a desire for administrative support in dealing with parents, for adequate security measures, and for control of hall traffic during classtime. The findings indicated that racial and socioeconomic demographies of students and personal family life do not create difficult teaching settings, but that problems were created by disruptive students, emotionally disturbed students, student absenteeism, and parents who do not value education. A rank order list of the sixty variables from the questionnaire is appended. (JD)

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by

Anna L. Bruner, Ed.D., Houston Independent School District
B. Dell Felder, Ph.D., University of Houston Central Campus
Loye Y. Hollis, Ed.D., University of Houston Central Campus

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STRESS PRODUCING CONDITIONS IN THE SECONDARY CLASSROOM

The findings reported in this paper were obtained from a study designed to describe teachers' perceptions of the variables which contribute to the difficulty of teaching in a secondary school setting. Much is being written about teacher stress and burn out these days, yet relatively little is known about conditions which contribute to stress producing conditions in the classroom. Until more definitive information is available regarding what causes stress for teachers, little can be done to alleviate or eliminate troublesome problems. More needs to be known about the variables which contribute to teaching setting difficulty; in fact, in the absence of an understanding of environmental context, research into teacher effects, teacher skill development, school planning, and the like, will be relatively fruitless.

This study was a descriptive one in which survey techniques were used to sample the perceptions of teachers concerning teaching setting difficulty. The randomly selected sample consisted of 164 secondary teachers employed by the Houston Independent School District. The instrument, a sixty item questionnaire, was developed by the investigator and included variables from the following categories in the school environment: student characteristics, managerial efficiency, instructional program, material resources, teacher personal needs, teaching assignment characteristics, family/home characteristics, and facilities. The questionnaire directed the teachers to rate the items according to the degree the item would contribute to a difficult teaching setting, using a nine-point rating scale. A frequency distribution was generated in order to obtain the results. Using the mean score for each variable from the total sample of teachers, the sixty context variables were ranked according to the perceived difficulty of the item.

The results revealed that nineteen of the sixty variables were perceived as creating great difficulty in a teaching setting (mean ratings of 7.05 or higher) and ten variables were perceived as creating little difficulty in a teaching setting (mean ratings of 3.67 or lower). The remaining variables were perceived as creating moderate difficulty.

The nineteen highest ranked variables clustered around two dominant themes: classroom management and administrative management. Classroom management concerns are at the top of the list for teachers for they named a lack of administrative support for discipline in first place and teaching hostile and disruptive students in second place.

Variables concerned with the management dimension of schools were ranked high by the teachers in this study. Fifteen of the nineteen highest ranked variables concern responsibilities of either building or upper level management. The findings emphasized a need for organizational efficiency by calling for less administrative paperwork, clear instructions, early class enrollment stabilization, fewer interruptions over the school intercom, and smooth management of necessary changes in the daily routine. The findings disclosed a desire for administrative support for student discipline problems, for dealing with parents, for adequate security measures, and for control of hall traffic during classtime. Adequately functioning

heating and cooling equipment was requested as well as clean buildings and grounds. Smaller teacher-pupil ratios, adequate textbooks, adequate duplicating materials, and permanent classrooms for all teachers were named as elements which would lessen difficulties for teachers.

Student and family/home characteristics produced the most diverse findings. The findings of this study indicated that racial and socioeconomic demographics of students and families do not create difficult teaching settings, whereas hostile and disruptive students, emotionally disturbed students, student absenteeism, and parents who do not value education do create problems.

Neither old buildings in good condition, portable buildings, or schools which encourage educational innovations created problems for the teachers in this study.

Most of the identified difficulties in this study lie within the control of school district personnel. Only a few of the major findings would be difficult for teachers and administrators to tackle directly. This suggests that something can be done about alleviating teaching setting difficulty if people want to do it, are trained in the skills of doing it, and can allocate the necessary money to do it.

Descriptive Statistics for Total Sample of Teachers on Sixty Context Variables

Context Variable	Rank Order	Mean	Standard Deviation
Lack of support from building administration concerning student discipline	1	8.21	1.46
Teaching a large percentage of students whose behavior is hostile and disruptive	2	8.17	1.48
Burdensome administrative paperwork	3	7.82	1.51
A high rate of student absenteeism	4	7.81	1.52
Insufficient support from the building administration when dealing with parents	5	7.80	1.60
Inadequate security measures for protection of self and property	6	7.71	1.59
Many students and/or outside visitors in the halls during classtime	7	7.58	1.75
No permanent classroom	8	7.52	1.99

Context Variable	Rank Order	Mean	Standard Deviation
Vague and conflicting instructions from the building administration	9	7.49	1.86
Too many students in individual classes	10	7.42	1.99
Lack of early class enrollment stabilization	11	7.40	1.71
A poorly operating air-conditioning and/or heating system	12	7.37	1.90
Inadequate materials and equipment for duplicating	13	7.35	1.78
Presence of emotionally disturbed students in the classroom	13	7.35	1.90
Many unscheduled interruptions over the intercom during the school day	15	7.20	1.74
Poor management by the building administration of necessary changes in the daily routine	16	7.16	1.74
Dirty, unkept classrooms, buildings, and grounds	17	7.14	1.69
No textbooks on reading levels or students	18	7.11	2.10

Context Variable	Rank Order	Mean	Standard Deviation
Parents of students do not value education	19	7.95	1.99
Inadeuqate space and equipment in classrooms	20	6.89	1.75
Incompetent colleagues	21	6.87	1.96
Parents of students exert great influence over educational matters	22	6.71	2.27
Inefficient distribution of books and/or poor book accounting system by the building administration	23	6.69	2.10
An open concept building with large, unwalled instructional areas	24	6.67	2.24
Lack of consensus on minimum standards for student promotion	25	6.65	1.79
Inadequate provision of supplementary materials/supplies	26	6.56	1.81
Students absenteeism for extracurricular activities	26	6.56	1.77
Inefficient management of computerized procedures	26	6.56	1.93

Context Variable	Rank Order	Mean	Standard Deviation
Lack of faculty participation in decision-making	29	6.36	1.84
An inefficient office attendance-keeping system	30	6.21	2.37
Inadequate guidance and counseling services for students	31	6.18	2.10
Lack of rapport among staff members	32	5.99	1.99
Inadequate provision of teaching aids	33	5.95	1.96
A large percentage of the students work many hours after and on the weekends	33	5.95	2.15
Groups too broad in ability	35	5.87	2.14
Inadequate appraisal and feedback on the teacher's work	35	5.87	2.03
School is located in an area where the people are highly transient	37	5.82	2.34
Inadequate recognition and reward for professional competence	38	5.79	2.10

Context Variable	Rank Order	Mean	Standard Deviation
Mandatory individualized instruction	39	5.74	2.37
An inadequate library	40	5.71	2.28
Classes filled with students of low ability	41	5.67	2.44
Mandatory team teaching	41	5.67	2.41
A school which is located far from the teacher's home	43	5.66	2.79
"Floating" teacher use of classroom during teacher's conference period	44	5.65	2.48
Inadequate assistance from department heads	45	5.64	2.33
Parents of students seldom come to school or contact teachers	46	5.56	1.95
Presence of students who have severe visual or auditory handicaps	47	5.55	2.57
Lunch, hall, or grounds supervision duties	47	5.55	2.52

Context Variable	Rank Order	Mean	Standard Deviation
Little or no sharing of ideas and materials between faculty members	49	5.54	1.38
Inadequate parking facilities	50	5.33	2.49
A school which encourages experimenting with educational innovations	51	3.67	2.37
Teaching a large percentage of students of different ethnicity from the teacher's	52	3.62	2.51
Parents of students are mainly welfare recipients	53	3.54	2.30
Presence of many majority-to-minority transfer students	54	3.46	2.41
An old building lacking modern style and convenience, but in good condition	55	3.39	1.86
Teaching a large percentage of students of different socioeconomic background from the teacher's	56	3.23	2.09
Teaching in a portable building	57	3.04	2.03

Context Variable	Rank Order	Mean	Standard Deviation
Parents of students are mainly blue collar workers	58	2.43	1.80
Parents of students are mainly professional people	59	1.98	1.53
Classes filled with high ability, college bound students	60	1.98	1.68